

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TAIPEI 05077 01 OF 02 190614Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----094779 190619Z /15

R 190507Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4692
INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TAIPEI 5077

EXDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, TW, CH
SUBJECT: THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS (OSI)

1. GROC CONCERN OVER INCREASED PRC MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE STRAIT, TOGETHER WITH BELIEF HERE THAT NORMALIZATION OF US-PRC RELATIONS MIGHT ENCOURAGE THE PRC TO APPLY MILITARY PRESSURE AGAINST ROC, HAS PROMPTED THE GROC TO INCREASE THE STATE OF READINESS OF ITS FORCES ON THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS. WHILE WE SEE NO INTENTION ON EITHER SIDE TO INITIATE HOSTILITIES OR TO PROVOKE AN INCIDENT, THE DANGER THAT A SERIOUS INCIDENT COULD OCCUR REMAINS REAL.

2. GIVEN THE HISTORY OF THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS AND THE "ONE CHINA" SYMBOLISM THAT CONTINUED ROC OCCUPATION OF THESE PORTIONS OF FUKIEN PROVINCE HOLDS FOR BOTH SIDES, WE BELIEVE THE USG WILL HAVE TO FOLLOW A CAREFUL COURSE TO REDUCE THE DANGER OF INCIDENTS, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ENSURING THAT NEITHER THE PRC NOR THE ROC DRAWS THE INFERENCE THAT WE ARE PROMOTING SOME CHANGE IN THE STATUS QUO.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 TAIPEI 05077 01 OF 02 190614Z

3. AS WE UNDERSTAND THE PRC POSITION, THERE SEEMS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT PEKING WOULD WISH TO DRIVE THE ROC OFF THE ISLANDS. WE BASE THIS ASSESSMENT IN PART ON RECOLLECTION OF A 1973 OR 1974 REPORT WHICH QUOTED CHOU EN-LAI AS TELLING A FOREIGN VISITOR THAT THE PRC REGARDED U.S. EFFORTS DURING THE DULLES PERIOD TO PERSUADE THE ROC TO EVACUATE THE ISLANDS AS EVIDENCE

THAT THE U.S. WAS PURSUING A "TWO CHINAS" OR "ONE CHINA-ONE TAIWAN" POLICY. IN THE SAME CONVERSATION, CHOU REPORTEDLY PRAISED CHIANG KAI-SHEK FOR RESISTING U.S. PRESSURE, COMMENTING THAT DESPITE HIS OTHER FAULTS PRESIDENT CHIANG WAS A NATIONALIST FULLY COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLE OF ONE CHINA. IN A PERIOD OF PROGRESS TOWARD NORMALIZATION, TO SAY NOTHING OF THEREAFTER, WE ASSUME THAT THE PRC WOULD BE EVEN MORE RELUCTANT TO ACT IN SUCH A WAY AS TO SUGGEST THAT THE PRC WAS WILLING TO SETTLE FOR THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS AND RELINQUISH ITS CLAIM TO TAIWAN ITSELF. QUITE APART FROM THIS, WE DOUBT THAT PEKING WOULD CONSIDER THAT TAKING THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS BY FORCE WAS WORTH THE ADVERSE REACTIONS THIS COULD BE EXPECTED TO GENERATE IN THE U.S., JAPAN AND ELSEWHERE.

4. THE ROC, OF COURSE, REMAINS COMMITTED TO HOLDING THE ISLANDS AND WOULD REJECT, AS THEY HAVE IN THE PAST, ANY SUGGESTION THAT THEY CHANGE THIS POSITION. BUT SUCH A PROPOSAL FROM US AT A TIME WHEN IT IS ASSUMED WE ARE NEGOTIATING NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS WITH THE PRC INVOLVES MORE SERIOUS DANGERS THAN A SIMPLE ROC REJECTION OF OUR ADVICE. A U.S. EXPRESSION OF CONCERN FOR THE SECURITY OF ROC FORCES ON THE ISLANDS AT THIS TIME MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS MEANING WE SHARE ROC FEARS THAT NORMALIZATION WILL INCREASE THE DANGER OF PRC MILITARY ACTION. SUCH A CONCLUSION ON THE PART OF THE ROC WOULD IN ITSELF INCREASE THE RISK OF INCIDENTS. THE ROC MIGHT ALSO INTERPRET OUR RENEWED PRESSURE TO EVACUATE THE ISLANDS

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TAIPEI 05077 01 OF 02 190614Z

AS EVIDENCE THAT WE HAD CONCLUDED A DEAL WITH THE PRC IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE NORMALIZATION.

SECRET

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SECRET

PAGE 01 TAIPEI 05077 02 OF 02 190618Z
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USLO PEKING

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TAIPEI 5077

EXDIS
CINCPAC FOR POLAD

5. WITH THESE PITFALLS AND THE HISTORY OF THE ISSUE IN MIND, WE PROPOSE DISCUSSING THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS WITH THE GROC NOT AS A SEPARATE ISSUE BUT IN THE CONTEXT OF INCREASED PRC ACTIVITY IN THE STRAIT, EMPHASIZING OUR INTEREST IN PREVENTING INCIDENTS. WE WOULD AVOID EXPRESSING A VIEW ONE WAY OR THE OTHER ON WHETHER THE ROC SHOULD REMAIN ON THE ISLANDS, BUT RATHER MAKE THE POINT THAT OUR INTELLIGENCE DOES NOT SUPPORT THE CONCLUSION THAT THE PRC IS THREATENING OR IS LIKELY TO THREATEN THE ISLANDS. WHILE WE CAN UNDERSTAND ROC CONCERN THAT PRC AIRCRAFT ARE NO LONGER STAYING INSIDE THE 3-MILE LIMIT AND HAVE THEREFORE DEMONSTRATED A CAPABILITY TO INTERDICT THESE FLIGHTS AS EVIDENCE OF AN INTENTION TO DO SO. WE HAVE LONG RECOGNIZED THAT IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE PRC SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT WOULD BEGIN TO USE THE STRAIT AND DO NOT REGARD THIS ACTIVITY AS EVIDENCE OF HOSTILE INTENT IN GENERAL OR SPECIFICALLY AGAINST THE OSI.

6. SHOULD THE SUBJECT ARISE IN CONVERSATIONS WITH PRC OFFICIALS, WE ALSO RECOMMEND AVOIDING ANY SUGGESTION THAT WE FAVOR AN ROC WITHDRAWAL FROM THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS. INSTEAD WE SHOULD SIMPLY SAY THAT OUR POSITION IS TO URGE RESTRAINT IN
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 TAIPEI 05077 02 OF 02 190618Z

ORDER TO AVOID INCIDENTS WHICH WOULD ONLY COMPLICATE EFFORTS TOWARD NORMALIZATION.

7. THIS DOES NOT, HOWEVER, PRECLUDE OUR MILITARY ADVISORS FROM CONTINUING TO DISCUSS WITH THE ROC MILITARY PRUDENT AND LIMITED REDUCTIONS OF THE ARMY FORCES PRESENTLY STATIONED ON THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS.
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